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Mr Mark McLoughlin
Acting Principal
Collective Spirit Free School
Butterworth Lane
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Dear Mr McLoughlin

Special measures monitoring inspection of Collective Spirit Free School

Following my visit to your school on 15–16 November 2016, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in May 2016.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The trust's statement of action is fit for purpose, so long as the recommendations outlined in Ofsted's letter to you on 4 November 2016 are incorporated.

The school's action plan is not fit for purpose.

I strongly recommend that the school does not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Oldham. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in May 2016.

Improve the quality of teaching, so that outcomes for pupils improve swiftly by:

- checking more rigorously on the quality of teaching and the accuracy of assessments, in order to set pupils ambitious, realistic targets that they understand and can work towards
- ensuring that middle leaders are appropriately trained and supported to hold their teams to account for pupils' progress, through accurate use of assessment information
- making better use of the good teaching that exists within the school to support improvement
- seeking out and learning from good practice in successful schools
- insisting on high standards in pupils' presentation of their written work.

Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:

- ensuring that sharper checking on all aspects of the school's work leads to more accurate self-evaluation and incisive short- and long-term planning that rapidly improves the school
- precisely defining the roles and remits of leaders at all levels of the multi-academy trust
- ensuring that leaders and governors at all levels have the necessary knowledge to challenge each other efficiently and successfully and fulfil their role in tracking the impact of pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding.

Improve pupils' behaviour and well-being by:

- urgently increasing levels of attendance and reducing exclusion rates, especially of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs or disability
- ensuring that the school's behaviour policy is consistently and fairly applied and that learning is rarely disrupted
- making a review of arrangements to keep pupils safe and happy in school an urgent priority
- providing a broad and balanced curriculum that captures pupils' interest and meets their learning needs and aspirations effectively.

Improve pupils' outcomes by:

- ensuring that the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics enables pupils to make good progress from their relative starting points and speed up their rates of progress in science
- providing a broad and balanced curriculum that captures pupils' interest and meets their learning needs and aspirations effectively.

An external review of governance, including the school's use of the Year 7 catch-up and pupil premium grant should be undertaken, in order to assess how these aspects of leadership and management may be improved.

It is recommended that the school does not appoint newly qualified teachers.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 15 to 16 November 2016

Evidence

The inspector observed the school's work, scrutinised documents and met with the acting principal, senior leaders, middle leaders, teachers, groups of pupils, representatives from the parents' forum, members of the local governing body including the chair of governors, and a director and the chief executive officer of the Collective Spirit multi-academy trust. The inspector conducted a series of short visits to classrooms to look at learning across a number of subjects and year groups, accompanied by senior leaders. The inspector took into account the 13 responses to Parent View that had been submitted since the last inspection.

Context

Since the inspection in May 2016, a leadership team has been established and new external appointments have been made. The acting principal, who had just started at the time of the previous inspection, has continued in the role. He has been joined by three experienced leaders, including a special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). Three middle leaders have been appointed along with three new teachers, three teaching assistants and a pastoral manager.

Following the external review of governance, a new local governing body has been formed with new governors. A strategic monitoring board has also been established.

The school has a group of Year 10 pupils for the first time who will sit their GCSE examinations in the summer of 2018.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Leaders know and understand what needs to be done for the school to no longer require special measures. However, the pace at which improvements have been made is far too slow. Despite the hard work, capacity and commitment of leaders, the impact cannot be seen as actions have only recently been put in place and have not been accompanied by the necessary professional development and training. At times, leaders have had to introduce and use systems and structures without receiving any training themselves. This has significantly slowed the rate of progress that is imperative for the school to improve.

The school's action plan is too unwieldy. It reads like a 'to-do' list and is lacking in clarity and focus. The plan is too far removed from the areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in May 2016. It is not clear as to who is responsible for what action and what the quantifiable evidence of success is. The timeframes within the plan are too open-ended and do not reflect the urgency that is needed.

Following the recommended external review of governance which took place after the last inspection, a number of committees have been established with responsibility for various aspects of the school's provision. The first full meeting of the newly constituted local governing body took place on the first day of this inspection. An inordinate amount of time has been lost because of strategic decisions not being made at governance and/or trust level. Too many decisions and approvals are being requested at too many levels. This has significantly impeded the rate of progress and the pace at which leaders in school can work.

The SENCo has ensured that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities have been identified and that the necessary assessments and arrangements are being made to meet these pupils' needs. The amount of provision leaders have had to put in place in a short period of time is phenomenal. It is still too early to identify impact as leaders have only just been able to put the basic requirements in place.

The external review of the use of the pupil premium has also taken place, but the recommendations made have yet to be fully implemented.

Leaders have worked hard to engage with the local community and parental support for the school is stronger than at the time of the last inspection. A parents' forum has been set up and is proving to be an effective channel through which questions and concerns can be raised in a constructive manner and leaders to respond.

The middle leaders are not yet provided with the support and development that they need to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement in their departments. Consequently, they are limited in how they can lead their department. Their job description is vague and it is not focused on strengthening the capacity of leadership at all levels and subsequently improving outcomes for pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Leaders have introduced a number of new initiatives so as to be able to check the quality of teaching. This has not yet been embedded. The systems to check and monitor teaching are not preceded by systematic provision of professional development for teachers to improve their practice. At the same time, teachers have not been proactive in doing what they can to ensure that their own practice meets the teaching standards and are too reliant and dependent on leaders. For example, teachers have been provided with strategies to meet the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities yet these are not being fully utilised.

Assessment information is not being used effectively to inform teachers' planning. For example, teachers are not consistent in their use of assessment and so pupils are receiving mixed messages as to how their work is being assessed and how well

they are doing. This lack of accurate information and consistent approach means that teaching is not always meeting pupils' needs. The teaching, in pupils' words, is too often 'dull and boring'. This leads to poor behaviour and limited learning taking place.

Pupils and teachers were unanimous in their view that the structure of the school day does not allow for effective learning to take place. Pupils and teachers think that the 45-minute lessons are too short because it takes time for pupils to move from lesson to lesson. They also think that the depth of learning is shallow because of having to rush to get things done, especially in practical subjects, and that the late finishing time does not allow for after-school classes or intervention to take place. During his visits to lessons, the inspector confirmed that these concerns were accurate.

The pupils also pointed out to the inspector that they must have a lunch provided by the school and that they are not allowed to bring a lunch from home. The lunches provided are of such a poor quality that pupils often throw their lunch away or miss it. This means they go to their afternoon lessons hungry and this adds to a lack of concentration and misbehaviour occurs.

There are pockets of good teaching, as pupils told the inspector. Teaching is most effective in English, history and modern foreign languages. There are plans to develop teachers' skills further and for good practice to be shared. However, this has not yet taken place.

The schemes of work currently in place for Year 10 are not meaningful or useful. They are a list of topics to be studied and possible teaching approaches. The schemes of work do not show progression and are not aligned to what pupils will need to demonstrate so as to be successful. This is of particular concern given this is the first group of pupils to be following a key stage 4 curriculum and for a number of teachers, their first time teaching their subject beyond key stage 3. This is further compounded by pupils not having made good progress while in key stage 3 and there being significant gaps in their knowledge, understanding and skills.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

The appointment of a new leader with responsibility for personal development, behaviour and welfare has brought about necessary, but modest, improvements.

The attendance of pupils is improving and the number of pupils who are persistently absent is reducing, but there is a long way to go until these reach acceptable rates. The work of leaders has been slowed down by the absence of thorough training in the use of management information systems and, consequently, leaders have had to spend valuable time on laborious tasks to obtain the information they need to do their jobs effectively.

The appointment of a pastoral team has strengthened the capacity but too much of their time is spent 'fire-fighting'. Low-level disruption persists and the behaviour policy is not consistently adhered to by all staff. The pupils the inspector spoke to said that their lessons are often disrupted, and frequently in the afternoon. The pupils said that the poor quality of lunches contributed to this and that the teaching was not so effective in the afternoons. The inspector noted that a small number of pupils were often absent from lessons and that the numerous changeovers between lessons meant that a significant amount of learning time was being lost each day. The inspector also noted that behaviour during the changeover of lessons was not good. Pupils were loud and boisterous and dawdled as they moved around.

The arrangements to keep pupils safe have been tightened up but the information that staff have received has not been backed up with quality training due to a lack of time made available for professional development.

Outcomes for pupils

The findings of this inspection on outcomes are very similar to those of the last inspection report. Leaders do not have an accurate and reliable knowledge of how well pupils are progressing. There is a lack of clarity, consistency and understanding around target-setting and how the progress of pupils is tracked and monitored. The aspects of learning that the inspector saw and the work seen in pupils' books do not correlate with the school's own assessment information.

As there have been no pupils who are at the age to sit external examinations, there is no validated outcomes information for the school. However, pupils' progress is limited because too much teaching is not meeting their needs, the structure of the school day is not allowing for effective learning, there is low-level disruption in lessons and the curriculum remains narrow and does not inspire the pupils and consequently is limiting their aspirations.

The expectations of pupils' standards of grammar, punctuation, style and presentation remain low.

External support

Leaders have made links with the Radclyffe School, an outstanding school serving a similar community, and Oldham Sixth Form College. At the time of this inspection, no support had begun and so the impact of such support cannot be measured.

As reported, the recommended external review of governance and the pupil premium review have taken place. There are various education consultants dipping in and out of the school but there is not yet a structured approach to how external support will be used to move the school forward.

By the time of the next visit, leaders and governors must:

- with urgency, ensure that the action plan accurately reflects the areas for improvement as identified in the last inspection and be very specific as to when actions will be completed, by who and how leaders will know that the action is having an impact in quantifiable terms
- ensure that sufficient time is given to the provision of high-quality professional development and support for teachers to improve their practice
- reduce the unnecessary layers of bureaucracy that have impeded decisions being made and actions taking place.